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ABSTRACT

Six communication instructors redesigned the curriculum of two courses to make integration part of teacher training both in course content and in the way trainees were taught and prepared. Having conducted a literature search, the six teachers developed a language arts interdisciplinary team to plan, pilot, and implement a new integrated approach. The resulting plan called for team teaching, opportunities for student reflection on their personal and professional growth, active learning, writing process strategies, integration of language arts components, planning and development by students of integrated teaching units around a thematic core, portfolio development, integrated language arts/reading practicum, and feedback and evaluation provided in many formats at many points during the program including video taping of student work and chances for a faculty member, teacher, and the student to view and evaluate the tape. The program was piloted with a reading methods instructor and a language arts methods instructor who, over two semesters, redesigned the curriculum for two courses as one course. They team taught the new integrated course. The program is currently in implementation, and refinement and evaluation are ongoing following Total Quality Management processes. (Contains 15 references.) (JB)

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INTEGRATED LANGUAGE ARTS: CURRICULUM REDESIGN IN TEACHER TRAINING

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RUNNING HEAD: Curriculum Redesign

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Integrated Language Arts: Curriculum Redesign In Teacher Training

For decades, elementary school educators have been reading about and experiencing the benefits of an integrated curriculum. Many teachers have investigated and explored the concept, reflected on outcomes, and solved problems as they move through the trauma of philosophical change.

Numerous researchers discuss the benefits of combining learning opportunities in a holistic manner. For example, K. Goodman (1986), C. Weaver, et al (1990), D. Watson (1989), and J. Harste, et al (1984) have conducted extensive observation and research to determine the strengths and drawbacks of the whole language approach to teaching reading and writing. Many teachers who are concerned about how thoughtful teaching and thoughtful learning blend to develop a productive classroom environment (Harste) have eagerly embraced this controversial approach. Others (e.g., Samuels [1988] and Chall [1983]) are not convinced that it is prudent to deviate from the traditional skills approach used in public schools for years. They are hesitant to give up the structured scope and sequence of the basal approach, feeling it is best for most children.

Still another group of educators feels that an eclectic or "use what works" approach is most effective. In The Council Chronicle (NCTE, April, 1992) it was reported that Patte Barth, editor of Basic Education (Council for Basic Education) takes such a stance. Barth expands on the eclectic approach by "... favoring phonics 'learned in context of reading and writing,' condoning invented spelling as long as 'accurate' mechanics are taught and ... advocating teachers' use of a 'whole bag of tricks' to

ensure that widely differing children 'read good books ... well and often'."

And so the controversy continues in educational circles today. Regardless of their philosophy of choice, few educators will disagree on the benefits of integrating the curriculum. Integration may be one common thread which weaves together the divergent trains of thought. Most educators agree that children learn best when they see relevance and connections between what they are learning in science, reading, math, or art.

Elementary teachers are encouraged to explore and implement an integrated curriculum by teacher training faculty at institutions of higher education. When it comes time to practice what is taught, however, relatively few teacher training programs model an integrated curriculum. Northwest Missouri State University was like many sister institutions in that we "talked the talk" but failed to "walk the talk." We discussed integration in our classes, encouraged our students to observe and read about integration, and required the development of integrated units, but we did not model integration. In the fall of 1992, six colleagues responsible for teaching the communication core of our curriculum decided that we would make integration part of our knowledge base or mission for training teacher candidates. This required us to make changes in the way we were preparing our students and the way we taught our methods courses.

PHASE ONE: Search of Literature

The first phase of our redesign was to search the literature to deter-

mine what was being done at the university level. To our dismay, we found relatively few references to integration of curriculum for the pre-service teacher. Few programs have been developed in an attempt to make integration meaningful to pre-service teachers. In one example, Kutz, Digby, and Thompson (1983) describe the development of a four-day integrated unit taught in a methods block with Carl Sagan's television series Cosmos as its core. Students were actively involved in the planning and development of the unit.

Continuing our research, we began to realize that integration alone was not our only objective. A general idea of integrating the communications classes began to expand into thoughts of interdisciplinary teaming and portfolio development.

Meichtry (1990) explored the effects of teacher collaboration through interdisciplinary teams and found that the arrangement created support systems for teachers both professionally and personally, promoted interactive decisions on classroom procedures, developed more shared instructional responsibility, fostered reflection on methodology, and encouraged integration of content across subject areas. Likewise, the Carnegie Council (1989) promoted interdisciplinary teaming and collaboration as a means of creating more meaningful curriculum and shared responsibilities among students and teachers.

Literature addressing the use of portfolios as tools for promoting growth and development was also explored. Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991), while working under the auspices of Northwest Evaluation Association, collaborated with a group of educators from seven states to develop a

working definition of a portfolio:

> A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection.

Portfolios can be powerful tools in helping students take charge of their own development. They can be used effectively as means of both instruction and assessment (Paulson, et al). Many researchers (Brandt, 1988; Burnham, 1986; Elbow and Belanoff, 1986; and Simmons, 1990) have worked successfully with portfolios at various age levels and in differing educational settings.

PHASE TWO: Forming a Plan

With exciting concepts beginning to emerge from our literature searches, the six communication instructors developed a Language Arts interdisciplinary team to tackle the challenge of planning, piloting, and implementing the new integrated approach. It was decided that our students taking the introductory level courses in Children's Literature and in Observation and Activities would be the appropriate beginning target population. In these traditionally taught courses, students are asked to start thinking of their next four years as a continuum of growth and development in the teaching of language arts. They are required to write their basic philosophy of teaching before they begin training and again at the end of their senior year, prior to graduation. The objective of this pre and post exercise is to allow students the opportunity for reflection on and evaluation of their professional growth. These exercises are an

integral part of their developing professional portfolios.

During the junior year of his/her student experience, the prospective teacher takes the five credit-hour, team-taught, combined language arts and reading methods course. This course is designed to encourage students to explore the written and oral communication skills. Diverging from the traditional lecture/reading format, this course models active learning, writing process strategies, and integration of the language arts components. Students are immersed in activities reflecting current and appropriate theory and research. Students reflect on their philosophy of teaching and expand and revise their thinking. Meeting this course in two-hour blocks of time during the semester allows the opportunity for more involved participation and self evaluation from the student. A culminating activity for the class is the planning and development of an integrated teaching unit revolving around a thematic core. In this exercise, students have the opportunity to integrate a least five curricular areas into a meaningful holistic learning experience. They identify objectives, create an effective learning environment, and develop appropriate outcomes assessment. This unit becomes another component of their continually developing portfolio.

The distinct advantage of the team-teaching approach to this class becomes apparent in that the team members have unique teaching styles and use various motivation techniques. Consequently, the students have the opportunity to see divergent teaching styles in operation. This creates interesting and lively discussions as the class proceeds.

The next stage of learning takes place in an 80 hour integrated lan-

guage arts/reading practicum experience in the elementary school. Collaboration between the Language Arts Team and the elementary school teachers is a critical element of the success of this phase of the program. The Language Arts team meet in a seminar with the students once a week. The elementary teachers informally provide input daily and meet weekly with students for planning and feedback. The multifuctional Language Arts team and elementary teachers meet informally daily and formally once a month to evaluate needs of students and program objectives. Constant, open communication on the part of all involved is vital. At the end of the practicum experience, the students select three of their best lessons and three of the least effective lessons and write an analysis of their teaching. The students also prepare a lesson which is video recorded. The Language Arts Team member, elementary teacher and student then view the tape together in a non-threatening analysis of growth and development. These self-analysis exercises and the video tape are then added to their professional portfolio.

PHASE THREE (Piloting the Program)

It was decided to pilot the team-teaching component of the integrated plan with an instructor of reading methods and an instructor of language arts methods. For two semesters prior to the course's being offered, this pilot team discussed, planned, revised, negotiated, and developed the course. This difficult task of integrating the curriculum as well as the pedagogy could not be rushed. Many problems were diverted by careful and conscientious collaboration.

During the pilot semester, monthly meetings were held with the pilot team, the students, the rest of the Language Arts Team, and the elementary teachers who would be involved in practicum supervision. Problems were discussed and adjustments made as the program was evolved.

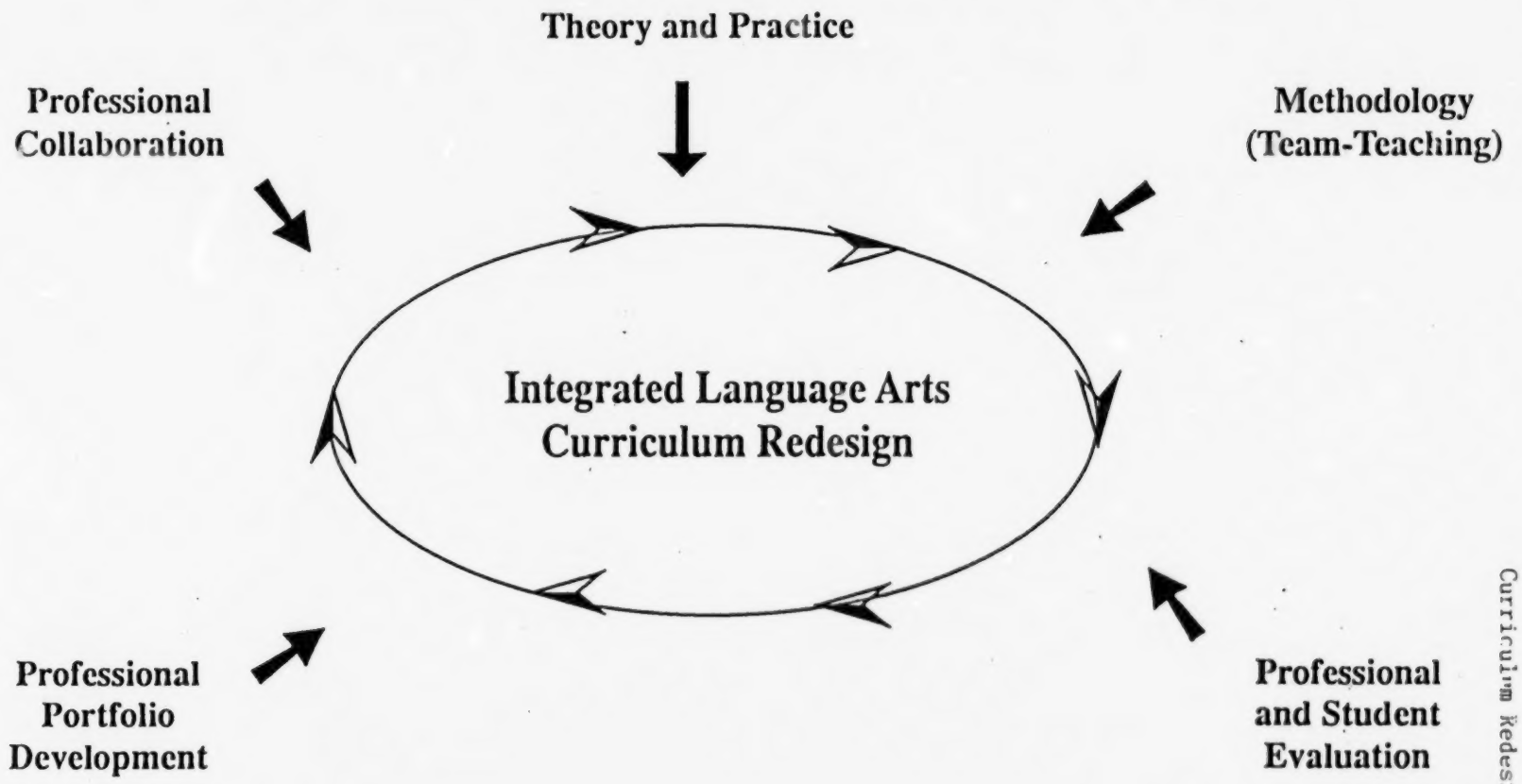
PHASE FOUR (Implementation and Refinement)

The program is currently in the implementation phase, but even as the program is developing, the concept of refinement must be addressed. Following W.C. Deming's (1982) total quality management cycle of plan, do, study, and act and the 7-step Total Quality Transformation Improvement Process (copyrighted by QIP, Inc. and P.Q. Systems, Inc.), we defined our "system" ("activities within an organization that work together for the aim of the organization" - Deming), assessed our current situation, analyzed the causes of problems, and tried out our improvement theory. We are now studying the results, standardizing our improvements, and planning continuous improvement. This process has proven to be a valuable tool as we seek to refine and polish our curriculum redesign.

The process of program redesign and change is not an easy one. As Gerald Ponder said in his final column "For the Record" in the Kappa Delta Pi Record, "Passages can be both painful and terrifying for individuals and institutions. But they also can be opportunities for growth." The process is indeed painful, but at the same time exhilarating and productive. Would we go through it again? A resounding "yes!" Discussions are already being conducted with our colleagues who teach the science, math, and social sciences methods courses to explore the possibilities for further

integration and collaboration. By working together, we are improving our pre-service teachers' ability to create a productive learning environment for children.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CYCLE



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